

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 302262
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WARNING NOTICE SENSITIVE SOURCES AND METHODS INVOLVED NOT
RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS--NOT RELEASABLE TO
CONTRACTORS OR CONTRACTOR/CONSULTANTS--DISSEMINATION AND
EXTRACTION OF INFORMATION CONTROLLED BY ORIGINATOR.

1. LEBANON. SIGNS OF A RETURN TO NORMALITY ARE BECOMING
MORE FREQUENT AS PRESIDENT SARKIS AND THE NEW AL-HUSS
CABINET MOVE TOWARD NORMALIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION.
BEIRUT RADIO OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY THAT LEBANON'S
VARIOUS RADIO STATIONS, WHICH HAD BEEN IN THE HANDS OF
RIVAL FACTIONS SINCE EARLY THIS YEAR, HAD BEEN MERGED
AGAIN. AL-HUSS HAILED THIS AS A SYMBOL OF LEBANON'S
"UNITED NATIONAL LINE" AND SAID IT WAS A PRELUDE TO SIMI-
LAR STEPS TO REUNIFY PUBLIC UTILITIES AND GOVERNMENT
INSTITUTIONS.

2. EMBASSY BEIRUT OBSERVED THAT FOREIGN AMBASSADORS HAVE
BEGUN TO RETURN TO BEIRUT AND THAT ALITALIA WOULD RESUME
FLIGHTS TO LEBANON ON JANUARY 1. SIMILARLY, FOREIGN
BUSINESSMEN ARE RETURNING, INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 302262

ESSO, AND BANKS ARE REOPENING; ALITALIA ANNOUNCED THAT

BEIRUT WOULD ONCE AGAIN BE ITS MIDEAST HEADQUARTERS.

THE SAUDIS REPORTEDLY BEGAN PUMPING CRUDE OIL TO THE ZAHIRANI REFINERY DECEMBER 11.

3. NEVERTHELESS, POLITICAL RIVALRIES, EXACERBATED BY THE CIVIL WAR, CONTINUE TO SIMMER OPENLY. UNKNOWN GUNMEN YESTERDAY ATTACKED RAYMOND EDDE FOR THE THIRD TIME THIS YEAR, WOUNDING HIM IN THE LEG; SEVERAL HOURS LATER, SHAMOUN NARROWLY ESCAPED SHOTS FIRED AT HIM IN A CROWDED STREET (AFP REPORTED THAT THE GUNMAN HAD BEEN A PHALANGIST). THE PHALANGE, REFLECTING THEIR DISTRUST OF THE SYRIANS AND DOUBTS ABOUT SARKIS' ABILITY TO REUNIFY LEBANON AND ESTABLISH SECURITY, SWORE IN THREE THOUSAND NEW RECRUITS YESTERDAY, ACCORDING TO AP. FOLLOWING THE CEREMONY, 1,000 ARMED PHALANGE MILITIA PARADED THROUGH EAST BEIRUT IN DEFIANCE OF AN ASF BAN ON SUCH ACTIVITY; THE PHALANGE MILITARY CHIEF, BASHIR GEMAYEL, REITERATED THEIR REFUSAL TO SURRENDER THEIR HEAVY WEAPONS AND THEIR DEMAND FOR A SEMI-AUTONOMOUS CHRISTIAN SECTOR. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

4. WEST BANK. AFTER SEVERAL RELATIVELY QUIET MONTHS, CIVIL UNREST AND VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS ARE ONCE AGAIN MOUNTING. VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS TOOK PLACE IN NABLUS AND RAMALLAH OVER THE WEEKEND. THE OSTENSIBLE REASONS ARE THE PLANNED ISRAELI IMPOSITION OF A VALUE-ADDED TAX ON THE WEST BANK AND THE ISRAELI POLICY OF SETTLEMENTS. HOWEVER, THESE RENEWED CLASHES WITH ISRAELI TROOPS ALSO SEEM TO REFLECT THE RISING EXPECTATIONS THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST BROUGHT ABOUT THE NEW 'PEACE INITIATIVES' AND THE CALLS FOR A RAPID RECONVENING OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE.

5. IN OUR ASSESSMENT, IT IS LIKELY VIOLENT CLASHES WILL INCREASE ON THE WEST BANK AS TALKS CONTINUE ON MOVEMENTS TOWARD A MIDDLE EAST SOLUTION, SINCE THE WEST BANKERS VIEW THEMSELVES AS THE ONES WHO WILL BE MOST DIRECTED AFFECTED BY ANY PEACE SETTLEMENT. IN ADDITION, FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ON PEACE WILL ENCOURAGE WEST BANKERS TO VOICE

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 302262

THEIR DISLIKE OF CONTINUED ISRAELI OCCUPATION IN OPEN CONFRONTATIONS. PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF THEIR PALESTINIAN IDENTITY MAY ALSO INCREASE AS A RESULT OF THE CURRENT PLO CENTRAL COUNCIL MEETING AND OF CALLS FOR A SESSION OF THE PALESTINE NATIONAL COUNCIL (IN WHICH A BROADER WEST BANK PARTICIPATION IN THE PNC COULD BE DISCUSSED).

6. PALESTINIANS. A MEETING OF THE PALESTINE CENTRAL COUNCIL (PCC), THE PNC'S EXECUTIVE GROUP OF 41 MEMBERS, BEGAN IN DAMASCUS DECEMBER 12. THE PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS BOYCOTTED THE START OF THE SESSION, WHICH IS SCHEDULED TO LAST TWO DAYS. ACCORDING TO REUTER, THE MEETING IS EXPECTED TO DISCUSS FORMING A PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF OPTING FOR A WEST BANK/GAZA STATE. THE PCC WILL REPORTEDLY ALSO FIX A DATE FOR A SESSION OF THE FULL PNC, POSSIBLY IN JANUARY, TO ADDRESS THESE TWO QUESTIONS. (CONFIDENTIAL)

7. SYRIA. THE STABILITY OF THE ASAD REGIME HAS AGAIN BEEN BROUGHT INTO QUESTION BY RECENT EVENTS, INCLUDING THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON KHADDAM, AND REPORTS OF SEVERAL GROUPS PLOTTING COUPS.

8. ACCORDING TO A CLANDESTINE SOURCE, FORMER SYRIAN OFFICIALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE EXTREMIST BAATHI REGIME WHICH ASAD OVERTHREW IN 1970 ARE PLANNING A COUP AGAINST ASAD. THEY REPORTEDLY ARE BACKED BY IRAQ AND ALGERIA. THIS COUP PLOT IS ONE OF A SERIES WHICH HAS SURFACED SINCE SYRIAN FORCES ENTERED LEBANON LAST SPRING. MOST OF THOSE INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING ARE OUTSIDE SYRIA AND THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THEY HAVE SUFFICIENT POWER WITHIN THE COUNTRY TO TOPPLE THE REGIME.

9. FATAH'S PLAN TO SEND ITS MEMBERS TO SYRIAN CITIES TO ORGANIZE DEMONSTRATIONS DOES NOT APPEAR RELATED TO THE COUP. THE PALESTINIANS SEEM TO BE USING WHATEVER MEANS POSSIBLE TO RELIEVE SYRIAN PRESSURE ON THEM IN LEBANON. IN THE PAST, ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY IN SYRIA INSPIRED BY THE PALESTINIANS HAS WORKED AGAINST THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE--SYRIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE USED PALESTINIAN ACTIVITIES

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 STATE 302262

AS A PRETEXT FOR FURTHER RESTRICTING PALESTINIAN FREEDOM OF ACTION IN SYRIA AND LEBANON.

10. IN ORDER TO OVERTHROW THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT, ASAD'S OPPONENTS WOULD HAVE TO LINE UP SUPPORT FROM SEVERAL POTENTIAL OPPOSITION GROUPS. THE LARGEST OF THESE ARE SUNNI MUSLIMS (70 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION). THE SUNNIS HAVE FELT THAT UNDER THE ALAWITE-DOMINATED ASAD REGIME THEY HAVE BEEN DRASTICALLY UNDER-REPRESENTED IN RULING COUNCILS. SUNNI DISCONTENT WAS INTENSIFIED LAST SUMMER BY ASAD'S INTERVENTION IN LEBANON AND WHAT APPEARED TO BE SYRIAN SUPPORT OF LEBANON'S CHRISTIANS AGAINST ITS MUSLIMS.

11. THE TACIT APPROVAL OF SYRIA'S ROLE IN LEBANON GIVEN

BY SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT SEEMS TO HAVE DONE MUCH TO ALLAY SUNNI OPPOSITION TO IT. MOREOVER, PALESTINIAN ATTACKS, SUCH AS THE ONE ON THE SEMIRAMIS HOTEL, HAVE DECREASED SUPPORT FOR THE PALESTINIANS AND CREATED A GREATER IDENTITY WITH DAMASCUS' RULE. SUNNI INFLUENCE ALSO HAS BEEN WEAKENED BY TRADITIONAL RIVALRIES BASED ON REGIONALISM, IDEOLOGY AND PERSONALITY. NEVERTHELESS, SUNNI DISCONTENT WITH ALAWITE RULE, THOUGH SOMEWHAT REDUCED SINCE LAST SUMMER, CONTINUES TO BE EXPRESSED IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, WHICH IN THE PAST CHALLENGED THE ALAWITES AND USED ASSASSINATION AS A POLITICAL TOOL. (SECRET/NFORN/NOCONTRACT/ORCON)

12. EGYPT. IN EARLY DECEMBER A SOVIET DIPLOMAT IN CAIRO COMMENTED ON CURRENT EGYPTIAN EFFORTS TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS WITH THE USSR, SAYING THAT MOSCOW WAS INCLINED TO MOVE SLOWLY IN THIS MATTER. HE DESCRIBED LAST MONTH'S MEETING BETWEEN FOREIGN MINISTERS FAHMY AND GROMYKO IN SOFIA AS ONLY A PRELIMINARY EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. THE POINT WAS MADE CLEAR THAT THE SOVIETS DO NOT YET FEEL THAT CAIRO HAS TAKEN THE NECESSARY STEPS TO WARRANT A TANGIBLE SOVIET RESPONSE.

13. THE SOVIET DIPLOMAT DISCOUNTED RUMORS OF A SECOND FAHMY-GROMYKO MEETING, SAYING THAT ALTHOUGH THE WORDING OF THE SOFIA COMMUNIQUE HAD IMPLIED THAT THE TWO FOREIGN
SECRET

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PAGE 05 STATE 302262

MINISTERS WOULD MEET AGAIN, NO SUCH GET-TOGETHER IS PLANNED FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. INSTEAD, THE 1977 SOVIET-EGYPTIAN TRADE PROTOCOL TALKS, SCHEDULED FOR NEXT MONTH, WOULD SERVE AS A SIGNAL TO MOSCOW ON HOW FAR CAIRO WAS WILLING TO GO TOWARD NORMALIZING RELATIONS. HE SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED THE EGYPTIAN DEBT TO THE SOVIET UNION AND STATED THAT MOSCOW EXPECTED CAIRO TO MAKE SOME SATISFACTORY OFFER TO REDUCE IT. PENDING THE OUTCOME OF THESE TALKS, A SECOND MEETING BETWEEN FOREIGN MINISTERS MIGHT TAKE PLACE.

14. THE SOVIET DIPLOMAT OBSERVED THAT DESPITE EGYPT'S PROFESSED NONALIGNMENT, ITS POLICY WAS STILL TILTED MARKEDLY TOWARD THE US. HE DENIED THAT THE SOVIETS HAD RESUMED ARMS OR SPARE PARTS SHIPMENTS TO EGYPT, ASSERTING THAT ANY SUCH DEVELOPMENTS WOULD ONLY BE CONSIDERED IN THE CONTEXT OF A MORE FORTHCOMING EGYPTIAN POSTURE TOWARD MOSCOW.

15. CAIRO IS ALSO RELUCTANT TO MOVE QUICKLY TOWARD IMPROVING EGYPTIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS AND WILL UNDOUBTEDLY VIEW THE FORTHCOMING TRADE TALKS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR

MOSCOW TO EXPRESS ITS EARNEST DESIRE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS.
AS LONG AS BOTH COUNTRIES CONTINUE TO APPROACH EACH OTHER
CAUTIOUSLY, PROGRESS TOWARD NORMALIZED RELATIONS CAN
BE EXPECTED TO BE SLOW, AND THE EGYPTIAN ARMED FORCES
CANNOT EXPECT ANY SIGNIFICANT RELIEF FROM THE SOVIET
MILITARY EMBARGO.

16. MEANWHILE, THE EGYPTIAN AIR FORCE HAS MADE SOME
PROGRESS IN EFFORTS TO DEVELOP SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN ITS
MAINTENANCE OF THE MIG-21 FISHBED-J ENGINES, WHICH MAKE
UP ABOUT TWO-THIRDS OF CAIRO'S MIG FORCE, ACCORDING TO A
DAO REPORT.

17. WHEN THE SOVIETS NOTIFIED EGYPT IN LATE JANUARY
THAT OVERHAUL SERVICE IN THE USSR FOR EGYPTIAN MIGS WAS
BEING TERMINATED, CAIRO SOUGHT HELP FROM THE BRITISH.
A CONTRACT WITH ROLLS-ROYCE, SIGNED IN FEBRUARY, CALLED
FOR REPAIRS TO BE PERFORMED BY EGYPTIAN PERSONNEL IN EGYPT,
UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF BRITISH ADVISORS. (SECRET/NO
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PAGE 06 STATE 302262

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